

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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R 020600Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0590

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THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAM SENT ACTION NEW DELHI INFO  
BOMBAY AND CALCUTTA FROM MADRAS ON MARCH 29, 1974 IS REPEATED  
FOR YOUR INFO

QUOTE

DE RUSBAS #0414 0881135

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FM AMCONSUL MADRAS

TO RUSBAE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5246

INFO RUSBAY/AMCONSUL BOMBAY 1593

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C O N F I D E N T I A L

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE MADRAS 0414

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJECT: KERALA SITREP

1. SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE SUMMARIZES IMPRESSIONS OF  
THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC OUTLOOK FOR KERALA IN THE COM-  
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ING MONTHS GLEANED DURING RECENT TRIP OF CG AND POLOFF

THROUGH THE COASTAL AREA OF THE STATE FROM CALICUT TO TRIVANDRUM. MANY OFFICIALS AND POLITICIANS FEEL THE PEOPLE OF KERALA HAVE DEVELOPED A LIKING FOR POLITICAL STABILITY, AND THE GENERAL FEELING IS THAT THE COALITION MINISTRY HEADED BY ACHUTA MENON HAS A FAIR CHANCE OF COMPLETING ITS TERM OF OFFICE (WITH OR WITHOUT THE MUSLIM LEAGUE DISSIDENTS, WHO RECENTLY CAUSED THE COALITION ITS MOST SERIOUS INTERNAL THREAT SINCE IT WAS FORMED IN 1970). THERE IS NO FOOD PROBLEM AT THE MOMENT, AND THE PREVAILING MOOD IS TO HOLD THE CENTER RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING KERALA WITH ITS NEEDED FOOD. AT THE SAME TIME, THERE IS A GENERAL APPREHENSION THAT FOOD SUPPLIES COULD BECOME DIFFICULT IN THE MAY-JULY PERIOD, AND MANY PEOPLE FELT THAT THE CENTER MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN THE SIX OUNCE RATION OF RICE THROUGHOUT THESE MONTHS. DESPITE THIS POSSIBILITY, THERE WAS A GENERAL EXPECTATION THAT THE SITUATION WOULD NOT TURN VIOLENT IN KERALA. THE U.S. AND DIEGO GARCIA ARE NOT MUCH ON PEOPLE'S MINDS; WE SAW NOT A SINGLE ANTI-U.S. SLOGAN ON THE WALLS AND THE GRAFFITI REFLECTED THE STATE'S PREOCCUPATION WITH LOCAL AFFAIRS.

2. PROSPECTS FOR COALITION STABILITY. THE IMMEDIATE THREAT TO THE COALITION POSED BY THE DIVISION IN THE MUSLIM LEAGUE APPEARS TO HAVE PASSED. ALTHOUGH THE RIVALRIES WITHIN THE LEAGUE ARE LIKELY TO PERSIST, THE ELECTION OF THE MUSLIM LEAGUE CANDIDATE TO THE RAJYA SABHA ON MARCH 21 WITH VOTES TO SPARE INDICATED HE HAD RECEIVED THE VOTES OF BOTH FACTIONS AND THAT THE FACTIONAL DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE LEAGUE WERE CONTINUING TO BE PAPERED OVER. THE CONGRESS IS APPARENTLY PLAYING IT COOL TOWARDS THE LEAGUE, TAKING THE POSITION THAT EVEN IF THE LEAGUE DISSIDENTS WERE TO WITHDRAW THEIR SUPPORT FROM THE COALITION, ENOUGH VOTES TO REPLACE THEM COULD BE SECURED FROM OTHER PARTIES NOT NOW IN THE COALITION (CONGRESS (O) AND SOME OF THE VARIOUS SOCIALIST PARTIES ARE THE ONES MENTIONED). THE YOUTH CONGRESS IS IN FACT INTENT ON WIDENING THE SPLIT IN THE LEAGUE IN ORDER TO WEAKEN IT AS A POLITICAL FORCE. MOST OF THE PEOPLE WE TALKED WITH, INCLUDING THE CHIEF MINISTER AND THE GOVERNOR, COMMENTED THAT THE PEOPLE OF KERALA APPEAR TO HAVE DEVELOPED A LIKING FOR STABILITY, AND THAT, ON LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BALANCE, THE COALITION (WITH OR WITHOUT THE SLIM LEAGUE DISSIDENTS) SEEMED TO HAVE A FAIR CHANCE OF COMPLETING ITS TERM OF OFFICE. CHIEF MINISTER ACHUTA MENON WON HIGH MARKS FROM ALL QUARTERS FOR HIS PRAGMATIC, COM-PROMISING ROLE IN HOLDING THE COALITION TOGETHER.

3. FOOD SITUATION. THERE IS NO FOOD PROBLEM AT THE MOMENT. RICE IS AVAILABLE ON THE SIX OUNCE RATION AT RS. 1.60 A KILO

AND ON THE OPEN MARKET AT RS. 3.60 A KILO, AND MUCH OF THE LATTER RICE COMES FROM AS FAR AWAY AS NEPAL. WE ENCOUNTERED A GENERAL APPREHENSION THAT THE FOOD SUPPLY COULD BECOME DIFFICULT IN MAY, JUNE AND JULY (ACCENTUATED BY THE LOSS TO BROWN HOPPERS OF A LARGE PORTION OF THE CURRENT PADDY CROP IN THE IMPORTANT RICE-PRODUCING AREA OF KUTTANAD), AND IT WAS AN OPEN QUESTION WHETHER THE CENTER WOULD BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN THE SIX OUNCE RATION DURING THAT PERIOD. CHIEF MINISTER ACHUTA MENON, WHO HAD JUST RECENTLY RETURNED FROM THE CHIEF MINISTERS CONFERENCE IN DELHI, SAID HE HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT THE CENTER WAS GOING TO SET UP A SOUTHERN FOOD ZONE AND WAS ALSO GOING TO GET THE GOVERNMENT OUT OF FOODGRAIN DISTRIBUTION, "WHICH HAS BEEN AN ABSOLUTE FAILURE". HE EXPECTED THAT THE EFFECT OF A FREE MOVEMENT SOUTHERN FOOD ZONE WOULD BE TO LOWER PRICES IN KERALA AND RAISE THEM IN THE RICE SURPLUS STATES, WHICH IS WHY ANDHRA PRADESH AND ESPECIALLY TAMIL NADU COULD BE EXPECTED TO OPPOSE SUCH A MOVE. THE SHORT SUPPLY OF FERTILIZER IS EXPECTED TO HAVE A SERIOUS EFFECT ON CROPS LATER THIS YEAR, EVEN IF THE MONSOON PERFORMS WELL AND PESTS STAY AWAY. BUT THE CENTER IS HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING KERALA WITH ITS NEEDED FOOD (INCLUDING ANY DEFICIT CAUSED BY THE FERTILIZER SHORTAGE), SOUTHERN FOOD ZONE OR NOT.

4. VIOLENCE? DESPITE THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE CENTER MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN THE SIX OUNCE RATION DURING THE LEAN MAY-JULY PERIOD, THERE WAS A GENERAL EXPECTATION THAT THE SITUATION WOULD NOT TURN VIOLENT IN KERALA. EVEN THE FIERY YOUNG SECRETARY OF THE KERALA YOUTH CONGRESS (REFLECTING THE OPINION OF THE CONGRESS STUDENT WING, THE KERALA STUDENTS UNION, WHICH CONTROLS MOST OF THE STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS IN KERALA), DID NOT THINK KERALA WOULD BE ANOTHER GUJARAT OR BIHAR AND BELIEVED AGITATION WOULD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NOT TURN VIOLENT EVEN IF THE SIX OUNCE RATION BROKE DOWN. MOREOVER, THE AVAILABILITY OF SOME FISH FROM THE SEA (EVEN DURING THE MONSOON, WHEN FISHERMEN CAN'T BRING IN AS LARGE A CATCH AS DURING THE REST OF THE YEAR) AND OF TAPIOCA (AN ALTERNATIVE FOOD SUPPLY, WHICH WE SAW IN CULTIVATION ON ALMOST EVERY HILLOCK), CONTRIBUTED TO THE FEELING AT LEAST IN THE COASTAL ZONE OF KERALA THAT THINGS WILL WORK OUT.

5. INDO-U.S. RELATIONS. THE CPI CHIEF MINISTER, ACHUTA MENON, WAS THE ONLY PERSON TO RAISE THE SUBJECT OF DIEGO GARCIA WITH US, AND, IN THE SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSION, HE EXPRESSED HIS BELIEF THAT THERE WAS SCOPE FOR IMPROVED INDO-U.S. RELATIONS. INDIA, HE SAID, NEEDED AID AND THERE WAS NO REASON IT SHOULD NOT GET IT FROM BOTH THE

U.S. AND USSR AND FROM ANYONE ELSE WILLING TO GIVE IT.  
IF THE GRAFFITI WHICH COVER EVERY WALL IN KERALA ARE ANY  
INDICATION OF POPULAR ATTITUDES, THE U.S. AND DIEGO GARCIA  
ARE NOT MUCH ON PEOPLE'S MINDS AND WE SAW NOT A SINGLE  
ANTI-U.S. SLOGAN ON THE WALLS; ALL THE GRAFFITI WERE RELATED  
TO LOCAL AFFAIRS.  
EAVES UNQUOTE SCHNEIDER

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